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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: USAID OFDA REPORT - UPDATE OF OGADEN
SITUATION

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: This USAID OFDA report corresponds to a meeting hosted by the Ambassador on December 14 (septel), the fifth in a series of meetings of NGOs, UN agencies and donor countries, with the purpose of discussing and sharing information on the Ogaden. The general consensus at this meeting--and among USAID's NGO and other contacts--is that access to the region by NGO groups has improved and that interaction with the Ethiopian leadership and intervention by the international community (with the U.S. as the lead) has resulted in humanitarian food deliveries to primary distribution points. However, all NGO and other contacts agree that the degree to which the GoE has opened up is insufficient and that it is now a "race against time" to prevent famine-like conditions with potentially high child mortality rates from malnutrition and disease (specifically measles). Recent progress--largely in response to pressure from the U.S. and international community--has alleviated conditions in major towns, but the precarious humanitarian situation in the Ogaden districts of Somali region likely continues unabated in more rural areas that cannot be accessed for monitoring. Through floods in the north, poor rains and drought in the south, and an invasion of desert locusts, nature is now exacerbating the largely man-made crisis.

¶2. (SBU) Considerable food aid has moved to major towns and is beginning to reach distribution points in secondary centers, although the amount of food confirmed distributed remains insufficient. Capacity and access for health and malnutrition interventions is still very limited. UN and NGO access is gradually improving, but large areas still remain inaccessible and untouched. Faster movement on access is essential to minimize the scale of the impending famine. Needs far outweigh the funding committed to-date, with specific technical assistance also needed.

¶3. (SBU) The security situation remains tense and, according to NGOs, foreigners are suspect and watched very closely, along with any locals caught speaking to them. Insurgent operations by the ONLF and incursions from Somalia add to the instability and insecurity, causing truckers and NGO groups

to avoid many rural areas. Post is taking the lead in developing alternative approaches for the international community to undertake in an effort to alleviate the worsening situation. In this context, post welcomes the deployment of a modest sized assessment team. Due to security, access, logistical, programming and political considerations, the size and scope of the team should be appropriate, and include only the following: two health and nutrition specialists, information officer, food logistics officer, and team leader. END SUMMARY.

UPDATE ON CONDITIONS

14. (SBU) Food Aid: Food deliveries are moving at an increasing rate. To-date, WFP reports that 14,272 metric tons have been dispatched into the Somali region out of a current requirement of 52,000 metric tons. Though this food has left the warehouse, distribution to beneficiaries has been inadequate. For example, the UN and WFP report that about 60 trucks containing an unconfirmed amount of the food aid (but estimated at up to 600 MT), are still delayed at Kebribeyah, not far outside of Jijiga. These trucks have waited for military escort for some 20 days. Recently, approximately 40 other trucks that had been waiting were able to leave Kebribeyah with escort. Some distribution to beneficiaries is underway, although confirmed levels are still low. The lack of available trucks and exorbitant high prices of trucks available are slowing distribution. According to a UNOCHA report, payment for unloading of trucks has not been arranged, so food aid is being used to pay these costs. For example, the report notes that out of 812 metric tons of food recently delivered to Gashamo, 54 metric tons was used to pay for transport and porters. NGOs reported that the role of the military and political preferences in

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selecting beneficiaries remains a high concern, with very little information on recipients and limited access for monitoring by WFP in remote areas. WFP has been able to set up quickly in Kebri Dehar and Degehabur, but access is an issue to many distribution sites and only scattered monitoring reports have yet been received. (NOTE: Post believes that a USAID food logistics officer to assist and monitor food distribution is needed. END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) Commercial Trade: In light of significantly increased commercial access along major roads, food prices have returned to normal (or near normal) in the major towns of the Ogaden area. However, NGOs caution that food outside the towns is scarce. Movement of food outside of these major towns remains a concern, with persistent reports that the local population or traders are not allowed to move food to many parts of the rural areas. Reports from NGOs from more remote centers, such as Denan and East Imi indicate that no food is available on the local market, no food aid has been received, and malnutrition levels in both children and adults is rising. (NOTE: During the visit of USAID administrator Fore to Godeh, local officials reported that during normal conditions about 100 children suffer from severe malnutrition in the Godeh area requiring therapeutic feeding. However, as a result of the counterinsurgency operation, the level of therapeutic feeding for children has risen to 300. END NOTE.) UN and NGOs still report restrictions by the ENDF in order to keep food out of the hands of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in almost all rural areas, which also directly affects non-combatants facing severe food shortage. Livestock trade has improved in some, but not all towns. The UN and NGOs note that the Muslim Arapha festival is increasing local demand for sheep and goats, which has provided some demand and increase in prices. Demand and prices for camels remain at levels far below the pre-crisis period, as truck access to export markets across the border has not resumed.

¶6. (SBU) Health and Nutrition: Elders at the Somali pastoralist gathering in Addis Ababa on December 1 reported varying conditions for malnutrition in the Ogaden. The Korahe and Degehabur elders did not report visible signs of malnutrition, but elders from Fik zone reported significant numbers dying from hunger, though there is as yet no evidence to substantiate how many are dying. A follow up to the nutrition survey by Save the Children UK in Fik in early October, which showed emergency levels of malnutrition, has not yet taken place. The UN reported that the GoE is now proceeding with the UN on a rapid assessment in the Fik area, using a different methodology (not the officially accepted methodology of the GoE). Save the Children UK is not included in the survey, and Save the Children US has been told that they will not be allowed to participate in the rapid survey in Denan area of Fik zone. According to UNICEF, mobile health clinics from UNICEF have not yet been allowed to go to rural areas, and as a result of the lack of capacity and underdevelopment, the state health system is almost non-existent. USAID Addis has reported that where child malnutrition is already high, mortality can be expected to increase as the livestock milk dries up during the dry season. USAID Addis believes that this also increases vulnerability to predatory diseases such as measles and meningitis and to "Acute Watery Diarrhea," which has been already causing deaths for several months. (NOTE: Post believes that two USAID/CDC health and nutrition officers are needed to assist and monitor the situation. END NOTE.)

¶7. (SBU) Agriculture/Livestock: USAID Addis and NGOs have reported that the Deyr rains from September to November were below normal in most of the Ogaden area. In the agropastoralist areas, very little planting took place and virtually no harvest is expected even in the riverine areas (which were earlier affected by floods from highland rains). In the purely pastoralist areas, the available fodder is very low in the central Fik zone area, improving further east. USAID Addis noted to the donor community that pastures will be further eroded by recent locust infestations in the Korahe

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and Gode areas, which are the worst reported in the area for many years. The Deyr rains ended in mid-November in most areas, two to three weeks early, which will extend the long "Jilaal," or dry season. Rainfall is not expected in the area until late March or April. According to a UNOCHA report, although there are no reports of body condition of animals deteriorating yet, there are large areas which are still not accessible to surveys. There are numerous reports of male herders moving to new pastures with their large stock, leaving the women and children in villages or towns. Overall, the picture is one of deteriorating conditions over the coming months.

¶8. (SBU) Security: The security situation remains tense, including in the Somali regional capital of Jijiga. Post has received reports from the NGOs that several NGO staff members have left the region for their own safety. Two senior members of the Somali Regional cabinet have fled the country, and the Governor of Gode has quit, all citing their unwillingness to carry out security functions for the GoE. (NOTE: Post is attempting to confirm these reports. END NOTE.) USAID Addis and NGOs have reported that civil servants continue to be pressed into the government militias, and many have fled to avoid recruitment. NGOs and USAID Addis staff traveling through the region noted that there are numerous reports of punishment of locals seen speaking to foreigners, and there is fear of speaking to foreigners in public as a result. Information must be gathered carefully through personal relationships and trusted contacts. The Portuguese Ambassador who headed an EU troika trip to Jijiga reported that the EU ambassadors received little information during their trip.

¶9. (SBU) Insurgency: NGOs report that truckers from Somaliland are refusing to travel to areas outside of the

main towns due to insecurity, landmines, ONLF activity and ONLF-ENDF fighting. NGOs continue to inform us that as a result of insecurity they cannot and will not travel to many rural parts of the Ogaden. These situations also make potential food distribution to rural areas difficult. The Ambassador noted that the Ogaden and Somalia are linked together because of insurgents operating from Somalia.

COMMENT: U.S. EFFORTS SHOWING RESULTS, MUCH STILL TO DO

¶10. (SBU) The December 14 meeting at the Ambassador's residence as well as the general consensus among NGO groups is one of extreme frustration. While efforts led by the U.S. have resulted in positive forward movement in opening access for NGOs and UN food distribution to major towns, reports from the NGO community in particular indicate that the situation is getting worse. If food does not reach the rural areas quickly and in significant amounts, child mortality rates and famine-like conditions are most likely expected to increase. Post will continue to lead efforts among the NGO-UN-Donor group to develop new approaches with the GoE to address these concerns.

¶11. (SBU) Needs far outweigh resources and restricted access to the most affected areas remains a serious concern. Additional assistance is needed for emergency malnutrition support and health interventions, such as inoculation against predatory diseases such as measles and meningitis. Considerable additional support will be needed for rehabilitation and recovery activities and for livelihoods support, integrated with conflict resolution and peace building activities when circumstances allow. The proposed USAID assessment team will be an important support mechanism to assess needs. END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO